

HANDOUT 3.5 — WORKING WITH ADULTS

The following are some principles of adult learning. By understanding how adults learn, a facilitator is better able to ensure that this process takes place in meetings addressing public issues.

ADULT MOTIVATION AND RETENTION

- Adults prefer to determine their own learning experience.
- Adults are motivated to learn when *they* identify they have a need to learn.
- Adults can be motivated by societal or professional pressure that requires a particular need to learn something new.
- Adults can be motivated to learn when the *benefits* of a learning experience outweigh the learner's resistance.
- Adults use their knowledge from years of experience as a filter for new information and *don't change readily*.
- Adults learn best from their own *experiences*.
- An adult's experience is a filter that can function as a catalyst or barrier to learning something new.
- Ninety percent of what adults learn and retain in long-term memory is tied to previous learning (this is sometimes commonly referred to as "Velcro" learning).
- Adults like tangible rewards and benefits from training.

ADULT METHODS OF TRAINING

- Some adults like lectures. All lectures won't be liked by all adults.
- Adults like small group discussions.
- Adults enjoy practical problem solving. Adults want practical answers for today's problems.
- Adults retain learning that they discover and forget much of what they are told.
- Practice is a part of the learning process.
- Assess, don't assume.

ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Adults hate to have their time wasted.
- Adults like physical comfort.
- Refreshments and breaks establish a relaxed atmosphere and convey respect to the learner/participant.

Source: Hinkey, L. and Engleby, L. (instructors/editors). 2002. Navigating in Rough Seas: Public Policy Issues and Conflict Management. NOAA Coastal Services Center. 29 p.